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AUTHOR Sheridan, E. Marcia
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ABSTRACT

The premise of this paper is that teacher behavior and attitudes which uphold traditional sex stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, in which the male is always aggressive and unfeeling and the female is always passive and sensitive, are harmful to the psychological development of children. A positive sex role identification would include a recognition that each sex can show emotion, protect one's feelings, cry when something is truly moving, or be aggressive physically and mentally. Examples of sex stereotyping include expecting girls to be more obedient, boys to be chivalrous, boys to work the audiovisual materials machines, and girls to do the cleaning. Teachers are asked to search their own feelings about traditional male and female roles such as which parent should have major responsibility for childcare, which parent should be smarter or more successful economically, and which sex would they prefer to have as a boss. Ideas for increasing more positive sex role identification include values clarification activities, advertising studies, career education studies, and literature analysis at different levels. (MKM)

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E. Marcia Sheridan, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Indiana University at South Bend
1825 Northside Boulevard
South Bend, Indiana 46615

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TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS FOR DEVELOPING POSITIVE SEX ROLE IDENTIFICATION

For Presentation at

Symposium:

Understanding and Promoting Positive Sex Role Identification Through the Reading Curriculum

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TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS FOR DEVELOPING POSITIVE SEX ROLE IDENTIFICATION

Biologically the human race is divided into two complementary kinds, male and female. This is necessary in order to maintain and renew the species. Aside from these biological functions of reproduction, how much of our behavior is attributable to physiological differences and how much is determined by societal expectations? There are differences in anatomy and hormonal balance which equip us to be either a father or a mother. But "fathering" or "mothering" may be done by an opposite sex parent or even by someone not biologically related to the child. Societies throughout the millenia have established roles which are related to the survival of the species and the preservation of the culture. Probably the most significant of these roles are related to one's sex.

What does it mean to be a man or a woman? If one is male, one learns to be masculine. If one is female, one learns to be feminine. The roles attached to each sex have definite characteristics. Even very young children recognize the male role as having more power or higher status than the female role. In a study by Broverman and others (2), professional counselors were asked to describe a healthy male, a healthy female, and a healthy adult. Counselors attributed more positive qualities to masculinity than to feminity. The male role was described as being competent, rational, and assertive. The female role was also described in positive ways, having qualities such as being sensitive to the needs of others, affectionate, warm, and expressive.

But where one sex had positive qualities, the reverse applied to the opposite sex. Thus males were perceived as lacking in interpersonal sensitivity, warmth, and expressiveness, in comparison

to women. Females were seen as being dependent, subjective, passive, illogical, and less competent than men.

Although you may not agree with these women who assert themselves in the market place and the political arena, you can understand their motive of self-improvement. But the goals for males are much more ambiguous. For a male to become more feminine, in itself, sounds disastrous. We can deal with a "tomboy", but a "sissy" is much more threatening. The situation is comparable to a white male wishing he were black. After all, why aspire to a lower position? But in relation to earning power, being female, white or black, is a greater economic handicap (3).

When we look at sex roles we must realize that these are not immutable characteristics, such as having been born with one nose or two legs. We are talking about qualities on a continuum from one extreme to the other. The word "feminity" connotes one who does not hide her emotions at all, cries easily, and has her feelings frequently hurt. The word "masculinity", on the other hand, draws up the image of one who always hides his emotions, almost never cries, and has feelings not easily hurt. What society needs to realize is that a person who can appropriately show emotion, protect one's feelings, and cry when something is truly moving, is a much healthier person, male or female.

Probably one of the most stated goals of the educational system today is that of recognizing where a child is, and helping that child to grow. We recognize this concept cognitively when we teach literal comprehension before we begin to emphasize critical reading. Commitment to growing as a person is as important, if not more important in the long run, as acquisition of knowledge and skills. But upholding traditional stereotypes about what is masculine and what is feminine

conflicts with a child's growth into a fully developed human being.

Because most of us learned what it was to be a male or female before we could even think abstractly, many of our ideas about sex roles are simplistic or even subconscious. For this reason we need to raise our own consciousness about sex roles in relation to expectations, behavior, attitudes, opinions and values, if we are ever to be able to help our students to develop their full potential.

For example, unless we as teachers have a conscious commitment to a particular new method of teaching we are likely to end up teaching in the way we were taught. In addition, the social climate of the classroom is likely to remain the same way it was when we were students. In such an atmosphere we are likely to find girls and boys lining up separately, listed separately on the class list, and expected to achieve and to behave differently.

In examining your own behavior in the classroom, do you expect girls to be more obedient and to achieve higher in reading, writing, and grammar? Is the code of chivalry still alive in your classroom? Are boys expected to perform the heavy or dirty work in the classroom? Do the girls get first crack at the chairs when there are a limited number, while the boys are expected to stand or sit on the floor? Do you apply adult sex differences in strength to boys who are usually smaller in size than girls the same age?

In most cases the domestic classroom jobs related to cleaning up are assigned to females, while the jobs related to strength and mechanical ability are assigned to males. It has been found that most jobs related to moving and carrying things as well as operating audio-visual materials are usually assigned to boys. For elementary school children this kind of discrimination in classroom activity reinforces

traditional stereotypes and at the same time limits equality of opportunity.

In relation to reward and punishment in the classroom, children perceive males as having more negative types of teacher contact--more yelling at and paddling, yes paddling! One particularly perverse type of punishment requires that males sit with the females. If we continually restrict classroom opportunities for learning because of sex role expectations in the classroom, we are not really adequately preparing the students for the world outside the classroom. Therefore, we must search long and hard to find ways in which we are justified in differential treatment of boys and girls. If there are equal standards of behavior in the classroom, then a very obedient, quiet girl may be as much as example of problem behavior as the more attention-getting behavior of the aggressive and dominant boy. Extremely passive or extremely aggressive behavior is problematic when it occurs in either sex.

The role of the school in our democratic society is to prepare people to assume the responsibilities of maintaining the society. The citizen in a democracy is faced with choices and must make decisions regarding them. In this sense the role of the teacher is critical. The teacher must know where he or she stands in relation to the traditional and to the more contemporary view of sex roles. The more traditional version of sex roles views woman as the primary nurturer and child raiser with the male as the breadwinner. A more contemporary view sees both parents as nurturers, sharing responsibilities, and perhaps being equal earners as well. Because some basic ideas about sex roles stem from religious beliefs, it is necessary to recognize the legitimacy of the traditional view. But

this view need not be regarded as monolithic. As we adjust instruction to children of different abilities, we must also provide opportunity for children of different backgrounds.

In order to be truly effective in discussing sex role identification with others, we need to first examine our own ideas. Who do you think should be responsible for making the important decisions in the family? Which parent do you think should have the major responsibility for raising children? Which parent would you call in to discuss a childs behavior or achievement problems? How do you feel about a woman being smarter or older than her boyfriend or husband? Are there any circumstances under which you think it is acceptable for a woman to sacrifice her career? Would you personally prefer to work for a man or a woman, and why?

How would you react to a girl who acted aggressively or engaged in fighting, or to a boy who cried or ran from a fight? What do you think of a boy who plays with dolls? In terms of skills, do you think boys need to be taught to cook and sew and that girls need mechanical skills? Do you still feel that initiating and paying for dates is the male's responsibility? As teachers we may be in the position of reacting to similar kinds of situations in the classroom. Our nonverbal as well as our verbal reactions to such behaviors may have a significant effect on shaping our student's perceptions of themselves.

Because our society is changing so rapidly, it may be necessary to do some investigating on just how many of our students' families conform to the traditional nuclear family pattern of two parents, with the mother staying at home. In many cases parent conferences are scheduled during the day, depriving those working mothers and fathers

of the opportunity of participation. It may be revealing to you to conduct a study of the children in your class. How many children live with both parents, one parent, or relatives? How many have mothers and fathers who work outside the home, and what kinds of work are they involved in? Because work is the inevitable future for so many of us, the working mother can serve as a resource for the classroom instead of being viewed as an inconvenience or misfortune.

If we are to help our students develop positive sex role identification, then using specific exercises and techniques to raise consciousness can help us to achieve this goal. There are many activities which can be carried out in the classroom which can help both elementary and secondary students become more aware of their own ideas about sex roles and the way in which they are reflected in the classroom as well as in society. Although there are some indications that the traditional image of males and females in textbooks is changing, students can devise a checklist to examine the number and types of roles portrayed in their schoolbooks.

In small groups, ask your students to draw up lists of advantages and disadvantages of being male and female. This can also be done in terms of what they like or dislike about their own sex or about social rules regarding each sex. An interesting exercise is to have students identify which things they would or wouldn't do as a member of their own or the opposite sex.

Ask your students to list ten characteristics which describe males and ten which describe females. Then ask them to list ten characteristics which the ideal person should possess. Discuss what a stereotype is.

In the area of language have students write lists of words which are used to describe each sex. Examine the words for their meanings and connotations.

Study the image of males and females in advertising. Have children collect pictures from magazines or catalogs and discuss who is depicted with certain types of tools, toys, and products. Let them make a collage of the ideal male and female.

In small groups, have girls discuss their feelings about boys who cry, who aren't as smart as they, who are shorter, or who like to cook, sew, or knit. Let the boys discuss girls who are not very pretty, who are better in sports, or who are taller or smarter than they.

Ask your students to draw their own life line from birth to age one hundred, making notes on their activities every ten years. Ask the children what they want to be when they grow up. Then ask them to do the exercise again, this time responding as if they were a member of the opposite sex. Compare the two responses and have them discuss the differences.

The area of career education is being recognized as an important area of curriculum. It is also one of the most constructive ways in which to broaden the number of options for both sexes. Many of the newer career education materials are displaying both sexes in many jobs formerly occupied by only one sex. Have students collect or draw pictures of people in nontraditional occupations. Have them write a job description of duties, salary, and benefits for a job that interests them. Be sure to include the career of housewife.

Until women are fully integrated into curriculum materials, it is necessary to make a special effort to supplement what is presently

being used. Particularly fruitful is the introduction and discussion of famous women through biographies. In this way students will be able to identify the important contributions women throughout history have made to society.

While most of these activities can be done with students of any age, some exercises are more appropriate for the high school student. Sex role stereotyping pervades all subjects, and can profitably be studied in relation to all of them. Career opportunities are also better studied in relation to specific subjects.

In the social studies or history classes, students might study the role of the sexes in matriarchal cultures. Have students identify forgotten women in American history. Oral histories of older women in the community can be collected to give insight into our pioneer heritage. Ask students to identify those laws, state or federal, which differentiate between males and females. Identify the rights of women on an international scale with regard to voting, divorce, and abortion.

In the literature classes, have students analyze the messages of popular fairy tales and myths. Speculate on their impact. Have them write a nonsexist fairy tale or rewrite a sexist one. Those books in the high school curriculum which are about women shown a preponderance of neurosis and madness (3). While more positive examples should be included, it can be constructive to examine madness in the social context of women's lives.

In the art classes include the work of women artisits. Also compare the way men and women have been depicted in painting and sculpture.

Ask your students to conduct a survey of the number, types of positions, and salaries of males and females in a particular business enterprise, school corporation, or in local government.

An interesting as well as revealing exercise would be to have students write their ideal marriage contract. Have them include the expectations, duties, and responsibilities for both partners.

Because we are dealing with values as well as roles, it needs to be remembered that there will be many differences of opinions. The role of the teacher is that of helping students to clarify their own opinions and values regarding sex roles, rather than to impose those of the teacher. It is necessary, while discussing these issues, that the climate in the classroom be nonjudgmental in order to encourage free and open discussion. If we want the student to respond honestly, then there needs to be respect for that individual's right to his or her own opinion. Hopefully, with this atmosphere of acceptance, students will not only expand their ideas about sex roles, but in the process begin to develop into openminded people who can examine any issue and make responsible decisions for themselves.

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